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Recognizing the Inseparability of Culture, Learning, and Technology

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The aim of this special issue is to advance inquiry at the intersection of culture, learning, and technology. Toward this goal, the AECT Culture, Learning, and Technology (CLT) division sought original papers that deeply consider and address all three of these factors – culture, learning, and technology – in integrated and meaningful ways (beyond merely collecting, identifying, and categorizing people and outcomes demographically), in a wide variety of local and global contexts. We sought articles focused on the intersection and synthesis of CLT, and were particularly interested in work emphasizing issues of equity and inclusion in technology-mediated learning environments.

While significant amounts of research exist related to the three constructs individually, inquiry into the interactions and synthesis of all three together is scant. Culture, in particular, is too frequently considered as an afterthought, if at all. This may be partially explained by the fact that culture as a construct is contested space in terms of how it is defined, whom it references and how, and who can legitimately write or research about it. In educational technology related research, culture tends to be ignored, treated with shallowness, invoked to speak (or avoid speaking) about race, or used for blanket characterizations of various groups that do not represent and conform to dominant perspectives. But culture is not merely a proxy for race, minoritized or marginalized communities, or

any singular aspect. Culture is "*that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society*" (UNESCO 2001). Put simply, culture is the basis for everything that makes one human. We cannot accurately understand how best to attend to issues of learning and technology without acknowledging that culture permeates all environments in which learning takes place, and every technology created and implemented reflects and is imbued with aspects of the culture(s) of its creator. As technologies cross cultural boundaries, they may be used in ways not intended by producers, and in ways that are not always beneficial to end users. Focusing only on learning and technology, without understanding how both are influenced by culture, is irresponsible. A gap in the literature regarding how culture interacts with learning and technology distorts our understandings, and hinders our abilities to live up to the definition of educational technology as "*the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using and managing appropriate technological processes and resources*" (AECT Definition and Terminology Committee 2008, p. 1).

This special issue includes a variety of inquiry contexts from which authors considered the intersection of culture, learning, and technology. In the first article, Angela Benson provides a typology that can be used to organize CLT literature and guide future inquiry. In doing so, she highlights recent work as examples of emerging categories of CLT research and inquiry. As she notes, a unifying purpose of all CLT research is to identify methods and processes for ethical and inclusive practice.

Amy C. Bradshaw connects major benchmarks in the instructional design and technology (IDT) development timeline with significant concurrent events in the broader social context, as part of an effort to understand why social justice issues seem to be perceived as disconnected from professional work in IDT. Asserting that a culture of ignorance regarding systemic injustice and related issues leads to overlooking and reinforcing them in our work, she challenges us to make a

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needed shift in our field to considering how our work contributes to injustice, or might instead disrupt it.

Monica Sulecio de Alvarez and Camille Dickson-Deane write on the pitfalls of designing technology for mainstream use, using and designing with such technologies, and the pitfalls associated with both. Their article challenges our understanding of how learning has been understood in the past, how learning may be understood now, and how learning experiences may be designed, with particular attention to how contextually-cultured learning pathways can be achieved.

Deepak Subramony addresses the lack of attention among the mainstream instructional technology research and development community regarding issues located at the intersection of educational technology and LGBTQI stakeholders, and provides a rationale for why our field needs to pay more attention to this increasingly visible and significant segment of the stakeholder population.

Perien Joniell Boer and Tutaleni I. Asino note that the development of technological solutions often consists of a small group of experts selecting the type of technology and how it is to be used, regardless of the culture of the end user. In contrast to this tendency, they present a case on the importance of considering cultural norms and practices common to a people when developing technological solutions.

Dorothea Nelson and Gale Parchoma use participatory action methodology to give voice and ownership to prospective students and other stakeholders in the design of a culturally sensitive course. The paper emphasizes and explores the criticality of indigenizing / localizing research, and addresses various considerations in engaging inclusive research and practice.

Vanessa P. Dennen and Jiyaye Bong report on a study in which they examined interactions of educators and instructional designers from different countries in an online professional development course about using social media in education. They found learners first identified with their national culture as learners, and then, if they did not experience any cultural challenges, began to explore topics related to organizational culture.

Claire Goode, Bronwyn Hegarty, and Carolyn Levy describe a collaborative learning design process used for the redesign and redevelopment of all vocational and degree programs at a polytechnical college in New Zealand. The four-phase process has resulted in a change in organizational culture from one of siloed activities within programs, to a more integrated and communicative team approach.

Andri Ioannou and Vaso Constantinou present a case of practical and impactful technology research in a culturally diverse classroom. Their study demonstrates a promising use of interactive tabletops and related technologies in the field of education, in an effort to embrace collaboration, social perspective-taking, and understanding of the *other* to help students comprehend classmates' values and perspectives.

The authors of articles in this special issue come from and reflect different cultures and geographic regions, and discuss a variety of units of analysis. We thought it important to give authors latitude in terms of conforming to U.S.-centric stylistic issues. Thus, as a reader, you may notice differences in spelling and writing style, and these may be especially apparent to more frequent readers of *TechTrends* and those accustomed to predominantly U.S.A.-based writing. Lastly, and importantly, the articles in this issue should not be viewed as the definitive models for how to do CLT inquiry. Rather, they should serve to support wider and deeper consideration of important issues and themes, and facilitate further conversation.

On behalf of the CLT Division, through this special issue, we call on the entire educational technology community to recognize the inseparability of culture from learning and technology, and to commit to learning about and engaging issues at the intersection of all three constructs – not as an end in itself, but in pursuit of equity and justice in our professional work. To do otherwise is to abrogate our responsibility for ethical practice.

References

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